

Bridging cultures

For more than 30 years, Inma Gonzalez Puy has been working to bring Spain and China closer together.

From her role as an embassy translator to her tenure as the first director of the Instituto Cervantes Pekin and marriage to a Peking Opera Troupe drummer, Gonzalez Puy shares her reflections on the fast-changing Chinese capital.

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Artists create on carpet

China missed out on carpet art during the early years of industrial production.

Seven contemporary artists are making sure the country leaves its mark on the medium this time around.

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Learning to act creatively

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Bile collection painless?

Activists aim to block farm from second IPO attempt



A worker extracts bile from a bear at Guizhentang Pharmaceutical's farm in Fujian Province.

CFP Photo

By Zhao Hongyi

Traditional medicine producer Guizhentang is being blocked from listing on the stock exchange by a group of activists who say its method of collecting bear bile is inhumane.

In hopes of countering accusations of mistreatment by activists and TV hosts, the farm invited media groups to tour the facilities it uses to collect bile from 165 Asian black bears, also called moon bears, on February 22.

Bear bile is used as an ingredient in many traditional medicines and trades at a high price. Producers reduce the bile into powders or bottled liquids that are believed to relieve liver disease and high blood pressure.

Qiu Shuhua, the owner of the bear farm, used to work in the construction industry. In the early half of the decade, her husband fell seriously ill. She says his condition improved after taking medicine containing bear bile.

The experience motivated Qiu to begin farming bile from 400 bears, making her farm the largest in the south. She says her farm's extraction method is safe, painless and harmless.

In early 2011, Qiu applied to make a public listing, but was blocked by Zhang Kangkang, a member of the National Political Consultative Conference.

This year, when she applied again to

make an initial public offering (IPO), a number of TV hosts on China Central Television (CCTV) accused her farm of using inhumane methods to collect bile from living bears.

"We collect bile from the bears at regular intervals. They do not suffer any pain and are healthy after each extraction," Qiu said in a public statement on February 18.

She said her company's extraction procedure was unlike the former method, which involved the permanent implant of a metal pipe into the bear's gall bladder.

Qiu's farm and method was supported by a number of authorities including the China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine, which praised her new method of extracting bear bile.

"We developed humane methods to extract bile from living bears in the late 1980s and early 1990s," said Fang Shuting, chairman of the association. "Each extraction takes 10 seconds."

Qiu said her bear farm was licensed by the national and provincial authorities. "Anyone who opposes what we are doing is opposing the government," Qiu said.

Black bears are a wild animal assigned Class II conservation status in China. They can be used for commercial purposes only under strict supervision.

However, the bear is considered to be a species facing extinction, requiring

intense protection under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or CITES.

Bears used for bile farming are operated upon when they turn three years old, creating a permanent opening between the gall bladder and the skin — a part of the "humane" extraction method used by Guizhentang.

However, Monica Bando, a senior veterinarian at Animal Asia Foundation, said the operation was "dangerous and painful."

"Ninety-nine percent of the black bears receiving this operation have cholecystitis (inflammation) and gallbladder polyps. Most of the bears die of gall-related cancer," she said.

It's a sad fate for an endangered species that is being used to produce a chemical that has already been synthesized.

More than a decade ago, China developed synthetic medicines that have the same effect as actual bear bile, said Jiang Qi, vice president of Shenyang Pharmaceutical University.

But the synthetic bear bile has not obtained approval from the National Drug Agency as a substitute, as it is missing some minor elements present in natural bear bile. However, the synthetic substitutes for cow bezoar, tiger bone and musk have performed well on the market.

Behind the headline

The country has granted regulatory approval to 68 farms that harvest bile from more than 10,000 black bears. However, their legal status has done little to keep animal lovers from pressuring the industry.

Since Guizhentang announced its plan to begin trading shares on the Shanghai Stock Exchange, protesters have been dressing up in bear suits to raise awareness on the streets of Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Dalian,

Bitter harvest

Shenyang and Macau.

The listing is Guizhentang's second attempt after having been blocked by the China Securities Regulatory Commission after similar protests last year.

More than 70 public figures, including former NBA player Yao Ming, snooker player Ding Junhui, singer Han Hong and swimmer Zhang Lin, have signed a petition in opposition of the listing. The position was written by

the Ta Foundation, a non-governmental organization that advocates care and respect for animals.

Sina.com and QQ, two of the country's largest portals, found that more than 90 percent of the 19,000 respondents they polled were opposed to the listing of the company.

QQ's campaign to oppose the listing attracted the support of more than 3.4 million readers.

(By Huang Daohen)

Brief

Granny Ding needs your help

An early morning fire last Friday turned the house of an elderly animal lover into a furnace, killing roughly 150 of the stray cats she looked after, local media *Beijing Youth Daily* reported.

The cats died of suffocation or burns while trapped in the burning courtyard residence of 84-year-old Ding Shiyang in downtown Beijing.

A neighbor said she heard Ding scream for help and called the fire department. Firemen put out the blaze before it spread to Ding's bedroom, which housed another 30 dogs and 50 cats.

Ding said she hoped other animal lovers could adopt the survivors.

Ding started to adopt stray cats in the early 1980s, but has struggled to continue to care for them due to the large number of animals and her deteriorating health.

"She loves pets, but she is old," said a volunteer surnamed Zhou who sent money, food and medicine.

Zhou said he worried about what will become of the animals when Ding dies. "It will be better to have an organization to take care of these animals," he said.

But Ding distrusts such organizations. She formerly worked for a non-governmental animal rescue center that kept its animals in cages.

"It was wrong. You have to give them space or they'll fall ill and die. I let all my healthy babies roam free," she said.

Ding said she hoped those who wanted to adopt the animals should have a caring heart.

Breaking the 'iron rice bowl'

The country plans to launch a contract-based recruitment program for civil servants and create a performance assessment system that could see an end to lazy workers' guaranteed employment.

Civil service jobs are an extremely popular career choice in China because of job security, benefits and income.

The contract program will be tested in the provinces of Jiangsu, Henan, Sichuan and Hubei this year. The civil service law allows auxiliary positions that do not require the handling of sensitive information or require specialist expertise to be undertaken by contract workers.

At present, civil servants can only be discharged if they fail to complete the annual target set by their unit or cause losses to public or personal property that exceed 30,000 yuan.

(Agencies)

Fake is out

Consumers prefer name brands to knock-offs

By Huang Daohen

On a cold Monday morning, Phony switched off his iPhone alarm, put on a G&B coat and Naike shoes, got a coffee from the nearby Starbox and headed to work in a hurry.

Those aren't spelling mistakes.

The widespread joke is just one example of how manufacturers of knock-off products have found widespread popularity by using low prices to compete with international brands.

However, as wages rise and more top brands become available for purchase in China, consumers are shunning barely-functional copycat goods for the real things.



While die-hard Apple fans waited for the release of iPhone 4S last October, shanzhai factories were already hard at work on the "iPhone 5." CFP Photo

Li Lin's cramped morning subway commute has been much more bearable since purchasing a new mobile phone.

The 29-year-old IT engineer surfs the Internet, checks friends' microblog posts and plays games on his iPhone 4S, Apple's latest smart phone.

All things he could not do with his fake Nokia N97.

Along with the counterfeit Nokia handset, Li also bought a fake iPad and a fake MacBook Pro two years ago.

Price was the temptation. The three fake items cost Li a modest 2,000 yuan, while the genuine articles would have cost more than five times that amount.

Although the knock-offs didn't live up to his expectations in terms of function, quality and after-sale service, Li said they were worth the price.

His opinion changed after using a real smart phone, a friend's Samsung Galaxy. "After playing with my friend's smart phone, I decided to get one of my own," Li said.

"I decided to stop buying fakes because they aren't able to do most of the things you expect of the device," Li said. He spent 4,988 yuan for his iPhone 4S during Spring Festival.

Hu Xiaohai, a vendor at Zhongguancun in Haidian District, said Li is part of a number of buyers who are growing dissatisfied with inexpensive fakes.

"Nowadays, people want the real thing," Hu said. "Prices have gone down a lot recently, so why would anyone want to buy a fake?"

Many young people see carrying a knock-off phone as a face-losing gesture.

But face and falling prices are just some of the reasons that shanzhai companies are fading.

Hu said consumers who dropped by at Zhongguancun increasingly want devices that allow them to surf the Web, play games and download Apps.

"That kind of technology is tough for shanzhai producers to match," Hu said. His booth at Hailong Plaza is now losing ground to vendors selling iPhones and other high-

end gadgets.

For years, shanzhai phones have been part of a thriving chain of counterfeits that includes LV handbags, Adidas shoes and – most recently – entire Apple retail stores.

Statistics from the local research firm Analysis International show that shanzhai phone sales peaked in 2007, when they accounted for 20 percent of all shipments nationwide.

Factory orders for shanzhai phones have decreased rapidly over the last few years. Last year, shanzhai phone sales accounted for just slightly more than 8 percent of the total, the report said.

The trend isn't confined to electronics. There are growing numbers of shoppers choosing apparel and accessories from top names in the fashion industry.

At a Nike sports-apparel store in downtown Sanlitun Tuesday afternoon, a customer named Jiang bought a pair of athletic shoes and a shirt. Priced 1,000 yuan each, the Nike garments were five times as expensive as their counterfeit versions.

"But the difference between buying real and fake products is how you feel after," said Jiang, who is in his early 30s and earns roughly 10,000 yuan a month.

"I'd rather buy less and pay for a favorite brand," he said.

While shanzhai versions of Nike clothes still are available in Yashow Market, Jiang's view reflects a change in domestic consumers' attitudes.

A survey by consulting firm McKinsey last year found that more than 90 percent of women between the ages of 28 and 35 said they would be embarrassed to carry a counterfeit handbag.

The demand for fakes in the fashion industry also declined, with 10 percent of consumers willing to buy fakes in 2010, down from 30 percent in 2008, McKinsey said.

Zhao Xiao, a professor of economics with University of Science and Technology Beijing, said the shift has fueled the expansion plans of foreign companies in the mainland market.

Many international sportswear makers

like Nike, Adidas and North Face are opening stores in smaller and inland cities.

"Consumers realize that there is a difference in the quality between authentic and counterfeit," Zhao said. "They are disappointed with coats that have feathers falling out of them."

However, Zhao, who has studied shanzhai manufacturers closely, said there is still something positive in the country's notorious knock-off culture.

To some extent, the shanzhai phenomena is about being creative – in a Chinese style. Zhao said many shanzhai makers have elements that even mature companies could learn from.

"Those shanzhai manufactures are actually very innovative," Zhao said. "Not in their technology, but in their ability to adapt and react to trends. Shanzhai goods help common people express what they want."

Zhao said foreign companies do have something to fear from shanzhai makers – and it's not IP infringement.

"At first glance, many shanzhai firms and their products are easy to write off as being poor-quality knockoffs," he said. But there are simply too many shanzhai manufacturers. Even if 980 die, 15 may survive to become real companies – the competitors and innovators of tomorrow.

The Xiaomi phone is only one example. The phone became a sensation last year with its powerful 1.5GHz dual-core Snapdragon CPU and Android operating system – and a price point that was less than half as much as an iPhone.

"In a fair market, every player can use the same hardware and set their own prices. However, the companies that remain competitive are the ones that offer something unique that comes from their own innovations," Zhao said.

Shanzhai manufacturers have started innovating after years of imitating foreign products and business models, he said.

"Imitation is the first stage for all companies. Chinese makers are learning to play the long-term game by putting a twist on existing technology and patenting it," Zhao said.

Brief

Angry Birds developer to build 600 nests

Rovio, developer of mobile game sensation Angry Birds, said it will open 600 stores in China within three years.

Peter Vesterbacka, co-founder of Rovio, made the announcement during his short visit to Hangzhou over the weekend.

The purpose of Vesterbacka's trip was to meet with executives from state-owned telecom operator China Unicom in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, to discuss a project that is to be revealed in late March.

Vesterbacka said Rovio will open stores in Beijing and Shanghai this summer.

Angry Birds, which has players flinging furious fowl at swindling swine, has been downloaded more than 100 million times in China so far.

Vesterbacka said that Rovio stores in China will sell toys, stationery and even chocolate, offering about 2,000 different products. The Finnish company also plans to open a theme park in China.

"We are not planning a huge park like Disney, but a small one in the community, free for play," Vesterbacka said.

Walmart to take majority stake in Yihaodian

Walmart, the world's largest retailer, announced Monday that it is planning to increase its stake in Yihaodian, a fast-growing Chinese e-commerce website, from 20 to 51 percent.

Walmart will replace Ping An Group as Yihaodian's largest shareholder.

Walmart's stake in Yihaodian has been on the rise over the past six months. In mid-2011, Walmart acquired a 20 percent stake in the company from Ping An Group for \$65 million.

The website has encountered a range of challenges since its establishment in 2008.

Co-founder and CEO Liu Junling said the company currently relies on capital investment to maintain its scale. Back end technologies and high operating and logistics costs have placed a huge financial burden on the developing e-commerce industry.

Despite its growing turnover, Yihaodian is not yet profitable.

"Even Amazon.com spent seven years before making a profit; the turning point for becoming profitable is related to strategy," said Yu Gang, co-founder of Yihaodian. "Yihaodian is expected to become profitable after its sales reach 6 to 7 billion yuan in the next 2 to 3 years."

(Agencies)

Bridging art, music and culture – and China and Spain

By Zhao Hongyi

Inma Gonzalez Puy first came to Beijing to learn Chinese in 1979. She found a job at the Spanish embassy and was active in organizing events and parties related to culture and art.

Eventually, she fell in love with the city, married a Chinese man and stayed to witness this country's transformation.

In 2006, Gonzalez Puy became the first director of the newly established Instituto Cervantes Pekin.

"I love this job and want to work in China till the day I retire," Gonzalez Puy said.



Inma Gonzalez Puy

First impression of China and its people

In the 1970s, there were few Chinese restaurants in Spain, and even fewer Chinese books. But Gonzalez Puy was able to get her hands on Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, the Nobel Prize-winning classic about a farmer at the turn of the century. She also read *The Art of Life* by Lin Yutang, a great Chinese writer who died in the US.

"The traditional Chinese culture and life (portrayed) in these books attracted me," Gonzalez Puy said.

She tried to find a Chinese language class in Spain, but had no luck. The only way to learn was to visit Chinese restaurants, though she found the language spoken at most was Cantonese.

In 1979, as a college student, Gonzalez Puy finally got the chance to learn Chinese – in Beijing. She came back in 1980 and 1981 for two months each time as a student.

"When we arrived at the small Beijing airport, the first thing we saw was a huge portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong," she said.

The atmosphere was very different back then. Fresh in Gonzalez Puy's mind was a story her friend had told her about an uncle in Taiwan who was arrested when he was caught smuggling a Taiwanese watch in the back of Beijing Hotel.

But the times were rapidly changing, and Gonzalez Puy could sense the opportunity. After graduation, she landed a job at the Spanish embassy in Beijing.

"My first job in the embassy was to read *People's Daily*, the



Photos provided by Inma Gonzalez Puy

In 2006, Gonzalez Puy became the first director of the newly established Instituto Cervantes Pekin

editorial pages in particular, and translate," she said. Through this experience, she began to learn of the political and social trends of the early-'80s.

She remembers Chinese slogans such as, "Five Stresses, Four Points of Beauty and Three Loves" and "Get Rid of Spiritual Pollution."

"The 1980s was a time of great change in China," she said. "It was Deng Xiaoping in the daytime and [singer] Teresa Teng at night."

Involved in Chinese life and reform

Gonzalez Puy was quick to make Chinese friends in those early years. One of them – Liu Xiaosong – would eventually become her husband.

Liu was a young drummer in the Peking Opera Troupe who loved the songs of Teresa Teng. Inma was introduced to him through her wushu teacher.

"He gave me a tape of Teresa Teng's songs and I gave him a tape of Michael Jackson," Gonzalez Puy said.

Through Liu, she made more Chinese friends, especially musicians, painters and poets, including China's first rock star, Cui Jian, and poets Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Mang Ke and Zhang Xiaofang.

"At that time, they were poor and desperate, trying to figure out the ways of their life," Gon-

zalez Puy said. Bei has since immigrated to Sweden, and Gu committed suicide in New Zealand in the early 1990s.

With Gonzalez Puy's help, Liu went to Spain to study music. After returning to China in 1986, he became the drummer in Cui's band.

They practiced and performed in French fashion designer Pierre Cardin's Maxims Restaurant, the only place at that time that tolerated their "crazy" music.

In 1995, Gonzalez Puy collected several Chinese contemporary painters for an exhibition in Barcelona. Spanish visitors were astonished at their works, such as a pop-art portrait of Mao.

"Those guys were very young in those years," Gonzalez Puy said, "and look still young even today."

"It was exciting in the 1980s in Beijing, as the whole country was at the beginning of reform," she said. "Everyone was eager trying to do something different."

Efforts to bridge the two countries and cultures

Inma said she believes the most important thing in bridging two cultures is to emphasize their commonalities and shared history.

She cited how Spanish mis-

sionaries arrived in China in the early 16th and 17th centuries.

"They wore Chinese clothing, ate Chinese food and became involved in Chinese society," Gonzalez Puy said, adding that she admired these early adventurers.

She also cited Pablo Picasso, a great painter who had connections with three Chinese artists: Zhang Ding, Liu Haishu and Zhang Daqian.

In 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, El Prado Museum, the greatest museum in the country, had its valuable assets moved to Switzerland and France, much like how Beijing's Imperial Palace Museum's most important wares were relocated to Taiwan.

During the Spanish Civil War, more than 100 Chinese Communist Party members went to the country and fought against Franco along with rightists under Moscow's Third International banner.

Another figure who connects the countries is Chen Ping – known under her pen name San Mao – a female writer from Taiwan who lived in Gran Canaria in the early 1970s.

Her husband, Jose Maria Quero Ruiz, died in an accident. "But San Mao did a lot to introduce Spanish folklore and culture [to China] through her literature," Gonzalez Puy said.

Working at the Instituto Cervantes Pekin

In 2005, as the Instituto Cervantes – a non-profit organization that promotes Spanish language and culture worldwide – was preparing to set up a branch in Beijing, Inma applied for a job as its director.

The institute developed fast. Last year, more than 4,750 Chinese registered at the institute to learn Spanish.

The institute has a library in Shanghai and is expected to become an institute as well in the coming years.

Several Chinese cities, such as Chongqing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Changsha and Jilin, contacted Gonzalez Puy to see if Instituto Cervantes could be set up in their cities.

In addition to teaching Spanish – "More than 500 million people speak Spanish around the world," Gonzalez Puy said – the institute promotes Spanish culture and art, under Gonzalez Puy's direction.

It holds events not only from Spain but also from many Spanish-speaking countries, such as those in Latin America.

Gonzalez Puy also busies herself by receiving visitors and guests. "It's a great chance to be in touch with Chinese people and carry out our mission," she said.

Film commemorates Nixon's China trip

By Wu Hao

The Beijing America Center presented the documentary *Assignment: China – The Week that Changed the World* on Monday to commemorate President Richard Nixon's visit to China on February 21, 1972.

Made by Mike Chinoy, a former CNN senior reporter in Beijing, the film comprises numerous interviews of reporters who accompanied Nixon for his historic trip.

Justin Higgins, the deputy spokesman of the US embassy in Beijing, hosted a discussion, answering questions on both the film and US-China relations.

Before Nixon's trip, few Americans knew much about China.

"Up until then, the idea was that Mao Zedong ate babies for breakfast, so to speak," Bernard Kalb, a former CBS reporter, said in the film. "There had been this exaggerated characterization of the way the Chinese were, and the Communist system had basi-

cally been dehumanized."

China captivated Americans back home, but the country captivated reporters first.

"Everything in China, [where] you put your camera you got exotic pictures," Kalb said.

"The Nixon trip to China was without any doubt the most important presidential trip ever," said Dirck Halstead of United Press International. "With the exception of a president going to Mars, nobody is ever going to be able to do a trip like that again."

The most important accomplishment of the trip was reaching an agreement on the issue of Taiwan and the establishment of "only one China" via the Shanghai Communiqué, which was released on February 28 to signal the beginning of normalization of China-US relations.

Winston Lord, a former aide of then-secretary of state Henry Kissinger, witnessed the Shanghai Communiqué. He told China News

Service that the agreement was unprecedented. "Unlike any other communique before, we clearly indicated the differences we had first, then pointed out our common ground," he said.

Gavin Newton Tanzer, 24, founder of Global China Connection, an organization that aims to build relationships between Chinese and American students, recognizes the importance of Nixon's trip. While acknowledging disagreements between the two countries still exist, he told *Beijing Youth Daily*, "Those [disagreements] will not influence the general direction of our cooperation. With so many Chinese studying and working in the US, and so many American companies in China, who would allow our relations to go wrong?" China vice president Xi Jinping attended a commemorative banquet at Beijing's Diaoyutai State Hotel on January 16 with Kissinger and pointed out that Nixon's "ice-breaking journey" was of great significance.

Chinese winter sports get boost from Austria

By Wu Tong

On Wednesday at an event at the Austrian embassy, business leaders in China said they are confident about the future of winter sports and outdoor activity in the country, though stressed that the industry is still in its infancy.

"Winter sports are still confined to certain areas in China with a limited number of participants," said Gao Han, an employee at Beijing Raissun Investment.

He stressed winter sports have high potential in China, yet remain underdeveloped compared with countries with a long tradition of winter sports, like Austria.

About 4.2 million Austrians ski, accounting for 55 percent of the country's population. In contrast, only 5 million Chinese ski, or about 0.37 percent of China's population.

"There are many obstacles blocking our way from moving forward," Gao said. "The fundamental one I think is Chinese people's per capita income."

He noted that winter sports are often expensive.

"Not everyone can afford doing it," he said. "I think Beijing has the best condition to run winter sports, but apparently that's not the case for all the cities in China."

A lack of facilities and difficulty in maintaining equipment are also factors, said Li Yanqiu, general manager of Sanhe Doppelmayr Transport Systems.

As a country that has held the Winter Olympics twice, Austria possesses the experience to teach China how to promote winter sports.

"I think our way of managing and maintaining our facilities could be helpful for the development of winter sports in China," said Irene Giner-Reichl, the Austrian ambassador to China.

She said that though many parts of China are stay dry, efforts have been made to change those conditions to promote winter sports.

"I've visited two ski resorts where artificial snow is made quite well," she said. "And Chinese enthusiasts for skiing have dramatically increased in the past few years. Based on so many facts, I do believe that winter sports can have a bright future here in China."

The cooperation between China and Austria could be extended from winter sports to many other fields, such as clean energy and environmental protection. Sixty-eight percent of electrical power and 28 percent of energy consumption in Austria come from renewable sources.

"We're now building up a new platform with the Chinese government, hoping to organize both Chinese and Austrian companies to act on environmental protection," said Oskar Andesner, the Austrian Commercial counselor to China.

As part of a series of activities promoting winter sports in China, a ski event held by the Austrian embassy will run from February 24 to 26 at Wanlong ski resort. All proceeds from the event will be donated to the Little Flower Project, which focuses on helping handicapped orphans in the eastern part of Shandong Province.

US loosens visa policy for China

By Han Manman

The US has recently made concerted efforts to attract more visitors from emerging economies such as China to boost its ailing economy.

Starting last week, qualified non-immigrant Chinese applicants to the US can renew their visas without undergoing another interview if their visas expired less than 48 months ago.

The previous policy only allowed an interviewee a waiver within 12 months of the expiration date.

According to the US embassy, the new initiative includes B (temporary visitors for business and pleasure), C1 (transit), F (students), J (exchange visitors) and other categories, covering 95 percent of the total visas issued by the US embassy and consulates across China.

"We expect that this will benefit tens of thousands of applicants in China, saving them time and money, and making it easier for them to travel to the US more frequently," US ambassador to China Gary Locke said. "It will also free our resources to interview more first-time applicants, and to do so quickly."

"We find that once a country relaxes its visa policy for Chinese tourists, it usually produces immediate results in the growth of visitor numbers," said Jiang Yiyi, director of China Tourism Academy's International Tourism Development Institute.

Jiang said there has already been an increase in the number of Chinese who have signed up for tours in his agency, and he predicts there will be an 80 percent increase of tour groups to the US after the announcement of the new visa policy.

Besides simplifying the visa appli-



The US embassy has simplified its visa policy to attract more visitors from China. CFP Photo

cation process, the US is also assigning 50 new consular officers to China to meet increasing demand.

The ambassador said the US embassy also plans to reopen its former consular facility in Beijing's diplomatic neighborhood. Doing this would increase the embassy's interviewing capacity by 50 percent.

He said the average waiting time for an interview has been reduced to less than six days.

On January 19, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to significantly increase travel and tour-

ism to the US, with the goal of increasing visa-processing capacity in China by up to 40 percent this year.

Statistics from the US embassy show its consular officers handled more than 1 million visa applications from China in 2011, a 34 percent increase. The growth rate accelerated to 48 percent in the last three months of last year.

Nearly 90 percent of non-immigrant applications from Chinese nationals are approved, said Charles Bennett, minister counselor for consular affairs at the US embassy.

Learn creative acting at French drama workshop

By Wu Hao

The Multi-media library of the French Institute in China usually closes at 7 pm, but recently, those who pass by the building at Gongti South Road on Friday nights have noticed that lights are still on.

That's because inside the library, Mathieu Crepeau and the students in his drama workshop are yelling and acting in French—and laughing, too.



Mathieu Crepeau



Students at an acting workshop yelling in French.

Photos by Wu Hao

Acting out all the possibilities

Crepeau's drama workshop is part of the Sino-France Language Year. The workshop began on February 10 and will be held for two hours every Friday until March 2.

The theme last Friday was "emotion." Students chose their own characters and found partners at the class. Eight participants were divided into four pairs.

"The lines I chose might not be famous films, but people can interpret them with their own different understandings," Crepeau said. "There are many possibilities; it can be serious, funny or ironic. You can find many possible relationships between the two characters. There is great space to play."

Crepeau, who has 10 years of acting experience, said he wants to encourage students to exert their imagination, express their full range of potential and learn how to act.

"Today I'm going to let them act in a natural way first, then in a much more exaggerated way," Crepeau said. "Next Friday we will focus on body movements, maybe imitating some animals. And at the fourth class we're going to act thoroughly and for real."

Crepeau warmed up with line exercises, asking students to speak out as quickly as possible or as exaggeratedly or

loud as possible, making them more familiar with the lines.

Then he required students to think about the situation in the scene, the specific action and the different possible emotional relations of the two people, then write them down.

pronunciation and stress, and discuss how to further our understanding of a single word so we can act the emotion out in an appropriate way.

"I learned a lot in this workshop," said Nadia Wang, another student. "I learned

learn Chinese massage.

Crepeau's interest in Chinese massage began when he was Paris learning tai chi. His teacher of three years was his inspiration.

"For me, the Chinese traditional perspective of human

When he arrived, Crepeau found out that many Chinese were interested in French culture and literature, making him realize that the need for a drama workshop.

The Multi-media library of the French Institute in Beijing

"Each year, we have a French Culture Week in March," said Marc Fontana, the curator of the library. "During this week, 10 French words will be chosen as the theme for cultural events. A special French drama workshop revolving around these 10 words will be conducted for free on March 20."

The workshop is only one of several scheduled events.

"The exchanges between France and China have been developing quite well," Fontana said. "I worked in Moscow for three years, also as a curator. Exchanges there were much less engaging compared to here. We have contact with many libraries, museums and colleges in Beijing."

"Our goal is to attract the Chinese, to serve the Chinese to offer every chance for them to be exposed to French culture. We try to offer everything they are interested in."

The library has both French and Chinese materials, including CDs and DVDs.

For a schedule of the upcoming, visit faguowenhua.com.



Team performance

After that came the real acting. Students presented in pairs, followed by discussion. Crepeau tried to deepen the emotional interplay between the pairs by asking other students to exaggerate their presentations.

"Crepeau's method is very professional," said Yang Yingran, a student. "He makes us relax through the games, and trains us to arouse attention and interact with our random partners."

"Also, I really appreciate his attention to details. For example, he would correct my

how different emotions are reflected in the lines, and I learned how to immerse myself in the role."

"These students share many similarities with my French students," Crepeau said. "But maybe the French are more accustomed to this kind of play training; they tend to be more used to thinking from a different angle. So sometimes I need to push my Chinese students."

The actor-masseuse

Crepeau is a professional actor who came to China six months ago not to play, but to

nature makes a lot of sense, and the massage techniques can be very deep," he said. "Both can help people create a better inner and outer dimension, and understand and control themselves."

Crepeau believes Chinese massage can help him to understand his body and act better.

"If you have to act out a situation involving anger and have to repeat it again and again 30 times for a show, you have to feel and understand where that anger comes and where it goes, and sometimes throw in some variations," he said.

Organic farm greens the life of urban residents

By Wu Tong

It took a few years for organic farming to catch on in China, but now it's big enough to support a community of organic farmers in suburban Beijing.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a coalition of farms that tries to produce eco-friendly food to sell to urban residents surrounded by concrete and steel.

CSA formed in the 1960s in Europe and Japan as a response to concerns about food safety and the urbanization of agricultural land. Later it spread to China and was gradually accepted by Chinese consumers.

"At first, it was quite tough for us," said Shi Yan, a pioneer of CSA in China and also the founder of Little Donkey

Farm in Beijing. "We could barely make ends meet at the beginning. But later on, all the CSA farms started to work together and things then got better."

Shi said farms like his formed a union in 2009, which spurred CSA's growth.

People always go to CSA farms with family members. Old couples can often be seen, while office workers also often show up with their kids.

"People come here for different reasons," Shi said. "Some want to have vegetables in season or organic food; others think it's a good way to get close to nature."

For CSA farms, building and maintaining a tight connection with their customers is key to success, and also something that distinguishes



Some Beijingers enjoy spending their weekends working in the fields. CFP Photo

them from normal farms.

Shi said that many CSA farms limit their members each year. Customers need to subscribe a year in advance before they can plant and harvest on a plot. She said this is the best way to maintain a tight community.

Shi can clearly see the future for CSA and Little Donkey Farm. "The idea of community will be magnified," she said. "Meanwhile, we will keep building the sustainable food distribution system and creating the most natural way of living."

CSA Farms Recommended

Little Donkey Farm

Where: Shajian Village, Su Jiatuo Town, Haidian District
Open: Will be open in March. Daily except Sundays during winter, Thursdays during summer

Tel: 6246 0405

Website: littledonkeyfarm.com

Beijing God's Grace Garden Plantation

Where: Jiang Village, Liangxiang Town, Fangshan District

Tel: 13701277398

Open: April 1. Members only

Website: www.youjinongzhuang.com

Phoenix Commune

Where: 19-1 Fenghuang Ling Lu, Haidian District

Tel: 6851 5978 / 6248 1229

Open: By appointment one month in advance. Group visits on weekdays, family visits on weekends

Website: phoenixcommune.com

SunLin Farm

Where: 100 Luzhang Lu, Lubu Tun, Shunyi District

Open: April 1. By appointment one month in advance

Tel: 15810934622 / 13439858858

DeRun Wu

Where: Xinzhuang Village, Xingshou Town, Changping District

Open: Daily except Fridays. By appointment one day in advance

Tel: 8459 0809 / 13910062022

Spring is here!



The temperature made it up to 5 C last weekend. Many people went out to tour the hutong and enjoy a carefree afternoon in the sun!

CFP Photo

ASK Beijing Today

Email your questions to: weiyang@ynet.com

I saw a lot of cute puppies on the street outside Fourth Ring Road and I wonder if I buy one, what should I do next?

From a practical point of view, never purchase a puppy from the street. But if you do get one from an uncertified seller, you need to take it to the vet right away. Ninety percent of puppies from street vendors are already sick, and you will end up paying a lot of money to cure it from Day 1, with no guarantee the puppy will survive. If you really want a dog, it's better to find some literature about what it takes to raise one, and then find reliable companies that sell them.

Also, there are many groups that help stray dogs and have dogs available for adoption. We know how difficult it can be to apply for adoption, but it's only because these centers want to make sure their poor dogs won't get abandoned again.

Another way to get a healthy dog is to talk to a local vet. They will know if certain dogs are pregnant, and they might be able to help you adopt a pup.

I am moving from London to Beijing soon. My Chinese friends said it was cheaper to buy stuff on the Chinese mainland. Is it really cheaper to shop in Beijing for brand-name items from Nike, Adidas and Coach? Or is it cheaper in Hong Kong?

For imitations of brand-name products, it's cheaper in Beijing. If you're after the authentic items, it's cheaper – with more options – in Hong Kong.

Do you know where I can find cheap men's clothing? Most malls I have been to are expensive – even H&M.

For your situation, we suggest you try the zoo market. There is a major bus hub opposite Beijing Zoo. Buildings around there all sell apparel at wholesale prices. You should be able to find something nice and inexpensive. It might be very tiring the first few times, as the area is big and jammed with vendors and customers, but be patient and bring water and snacks. Oh, and don't feel ashamed to drive a hard bargain.

(By Wei Ying)

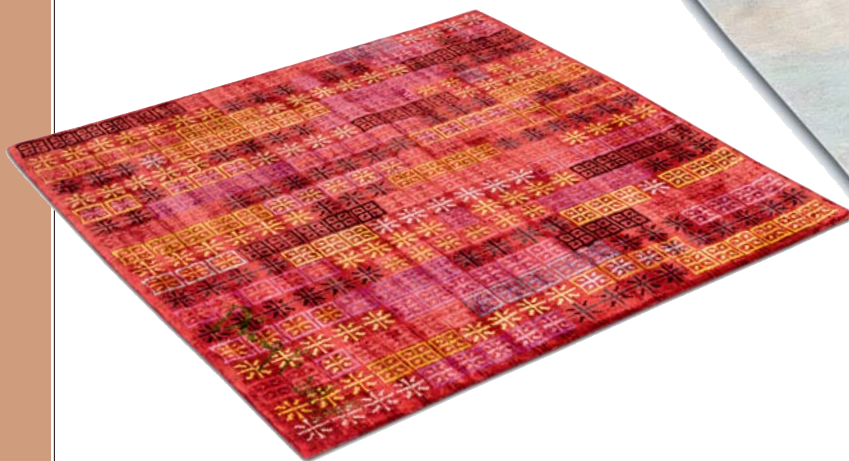
Contemporary artists

By Annie Wei

The art of hand-woven rugs saw its heyday during the early years of industrial production. However, at the time it was not regarded as a fine artistic medium.

China missed out on rug art at that time, as many of the more advanced techniques never made it to the country.

But seven top contemporary artists, including Fang Lijun, Yang Shaobin, Ding Yi, Zhou Chunya, Liu Ye, Tan Ping and Li Lei, hope to help China make its mark on the field through China Master Art Rug, a group project opening this October.



Rug design by Ding Yi



Zhou Chunya's Green dog, plane and TT

Many artists around the world have cooperated with Rug Star, a German company that produces handmade artistic rugs. But before the China Master Art Rug project, the company had never seen an order from the Chinese mainland.

That has changed thanks to Hugh Zhang, a student of art history at Bristol University and the new general manager of Rug Star China.

"My friends gave me the idea. They were looking at the designs that international artists have realized through Rug Star, and they said it was just the medium that Chinese artists should be exploring," he said.

In early 2009, Zhang told his idea to

Gui Weijie, chief editor of *L'OFFICIEL Art*, a magazine specializing in Chinese artists and art markets.

Gui recommended seven artists who had an interest in exploring mediums unlike traditional paintings and woodblock prints.

Her selection of seven artists brought together many with different styles and

influences, drawing on professional, academic and independent artists.

The seven include Yang Shaobin, born in Hebei Province in 1963, who is known for his red-tinged portraits of ghostly figures. Yang, Fang Lijun and Yue Minjun are considered the leading figures of Cynical Realist style in China, and Yang's work was selected in 1999 for the Venice Biennale.

"Rugs are a new medium for these artists," Zhang said. Each was introduced to the basic skills, the color limitations, material textures and complicated weaving techniques.

Zhou Chunya, born in 1955, first submitted a drawing from his peach blossom series for conversion into a rug. Zhou studied abroad in Germany and is known for his unique style that combines Chinese scholar style with European expressionism.

"The rug can copy what Zhou painted, but not the natural pattern of the *xuan* paper," Zhang said.

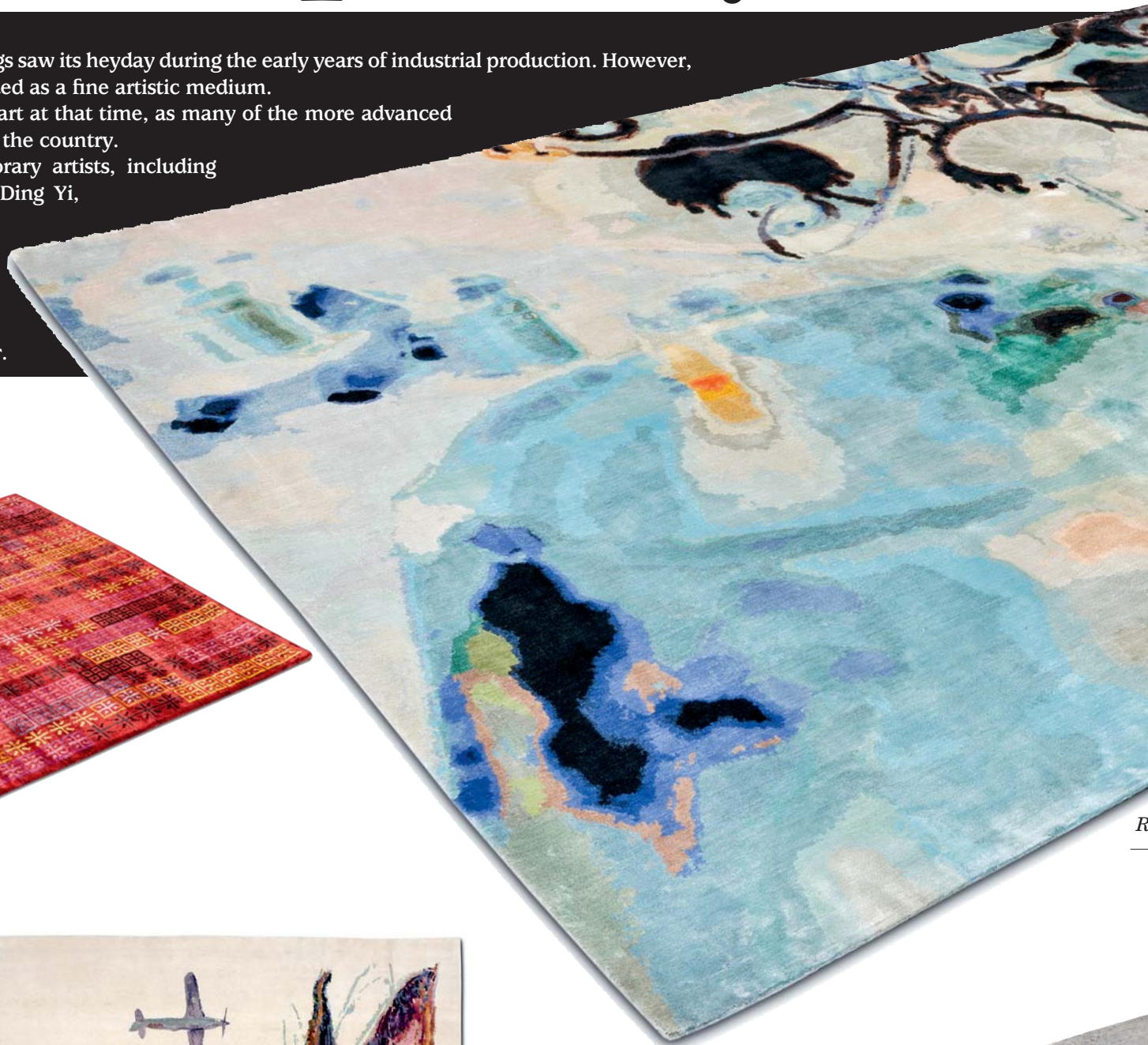
The peach blossom series was completed on *xuan* paper, a traditional medium with visible woven lines.

In the end, he submitted another painting, *Green Dog, Plane and TT*, from his green dog series.

There will be five copies made of each artist's rug, with the final being the "completed piece."

"The artists are getting more involved with their creation after seeing the revision," Zhang said.

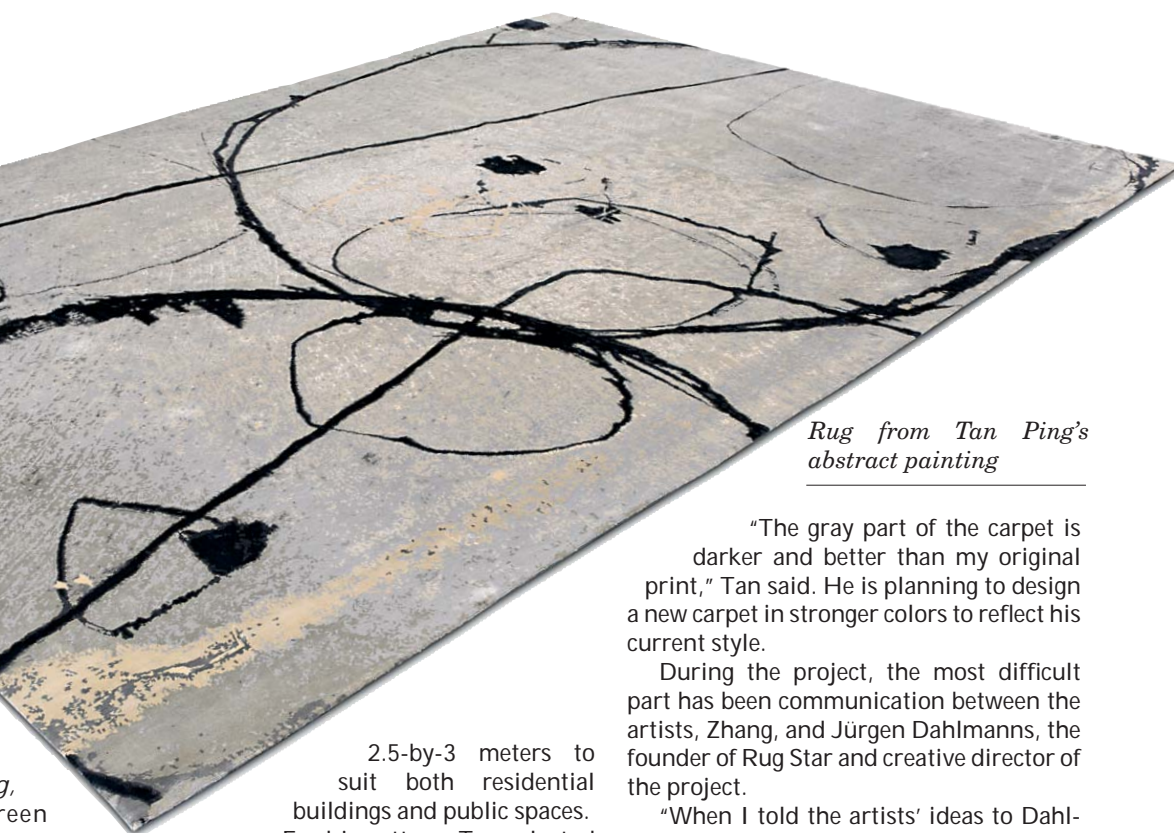
Tan Ping, born in 1960 and a graduate of the principle of China Central Academy of Fine Arts, planned to make his second



Artists create on carpet



Rug from Yang Shaobin's Dream series



Rug from Tan Ping's abstract painting

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2.5-by-3 meters to suit both residential buildings and public spaces. For his pattern, Tan selected one of his wood engraving prints. It took him a while to select a suitable painting from his works. "The circles, spots and lines have an extension in any space that will go with surrounding furniture," he said.

After seeing his first carpet, Tan suggested removing the black lines to make the carpet look more like a woodblock print.

"The gray part of the carpet is darker and better than my original print," Tan said. He is planning to design a new carpet in stronger colors to reflect his current style.

During the project, the most difficult part has been communication between the artists, Zhang, and Jürgen Dahlmanns, the founder of Rug Star and creative director of the project.

"When I told the artists' ideas to Dahlmanns, something was definitely lost in translation," Zhang said.

Zhou Chunya's first carpet has already been sold at auction for 500,000 yuan.

The buyer was an anonymous Chinese couple looking for something untraditional. Both had been fans of Zhou's work for many years.

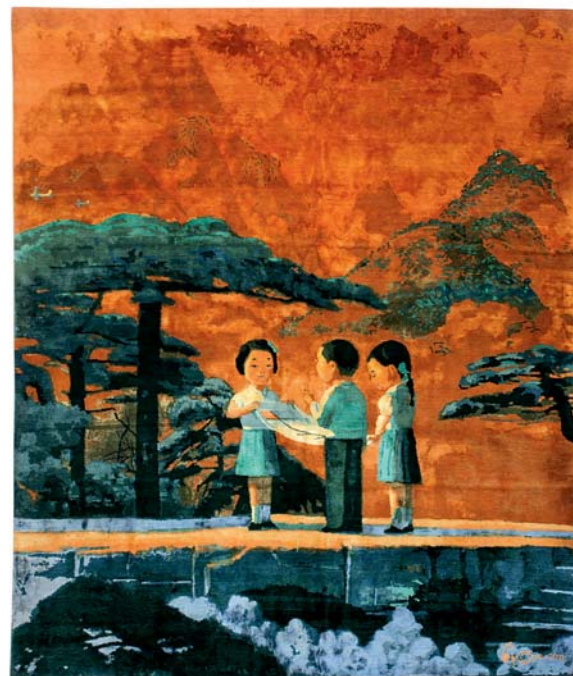
The artists' other rugs will be sold through their collectors, Zhang said.



Rug design by Fang Lijun's woodcut



Rug's design by Li Lei



Rug design by Liu Ye

Photos provided by Rug Star



Yang Mingyi

Searching for the spirit of Suzhou

By Charles Zhu

Yang Mingyi has made a name for himself with his depictions of the unique scenery of his hometown of Suzhou, Jiangsu Province.

Critics have praised his ability to portray scenes in which fog and drizzle mix to form a dream world, as exemplified in his painting *All Houses Are in the Misty Rains*.

The water-laden clouds move in fluent lines on Yang's paper, and bright dabs of color along the edges imbue each with a hint of vitality. Such imagery frames the black-tile roofs and white-washed walls characteristic of southern river towns.

In another painting, *The Fish and Rice Country*, Yang paints fish ponds, paddies and fleeting clouds that reflect in rainwater pools.

The paintings have been said to give viewers an extraordinary sense of calm.

Some critics say that looking at his paintings of rainy river towns is enough to make the viewer's heart leap into Yang's dreamy world of glittering waves, fish hawks and solitary sampans.

In *Spring Moon*, *Silvery Night* and *Misty Moon*, Yang paints moonlit scenes of lonesome arched bridges and quiet rivers. Suzhou's many such stone bridges were among the painter's favorite haunts as a child.

His paintings of snowy scenes are equally beautiful, bringing life to the imagery of Tang poets. *Early Snow*, for example, is a recreation of Liu Zongyuan's verse, "Thousands of mountains where flying birds completely disappear; unbeaten are the tracks in their multitudes."

Yang's work draws from years spent using a critical eye to observe the brushwork of dynasties past. Though the paintings by history's masters are indisputedly beautiful, Yang says they fail to capture the essence of Suzhou.

He hopes his new style of ink and wash can better capture the spirit of the city.

Despite working primarily in ink and wash, Yang's early years as an artist were spent studying woodblock printing, which he experimented with to render the river town on xuan paper in simple and easy lines.

Huang Yongyu, a leading contemporary painter, called Yang "the man who can find a golden deer in the forest."

Many of Yang's paintings of beautiful gardens, zigzagging river lanes and painted corridors are being preserved and exhibited at the China National Gallery of Art, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art and the British Museum.

Yang was born in 1943 and attended the Suzhou Arts and Crafts Institute.

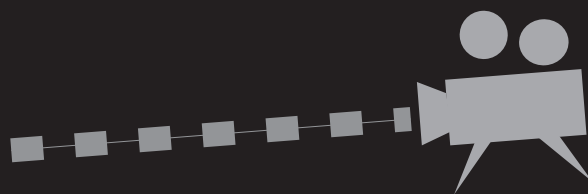
He became a teacher at the institute in 1962, and in 1981 attended an advanced course at the Central Fine Arts Institute, where he received instruction from Wu Zuoren, Li Keran, Wu Guanzhong and Huang Yongyu.

Yang went to the US to continue his training in 1987 and returned to China in 1999.



Misty days are Yang Mingyi's creative inspiration.

“If it weren't for my children, I'd have climbed the city wall and thrown myself off. --Yang Xiuqing”



Migrant work a one-way trip

By Wu Hao

With 80 percent of China's population in the countryside, rural issues are an important topic for the nation.

Li Junhu, director of *Where Should I Go*, has spent the last 10 years witnessing how current trends are reshaping rural communities.

In this latest documentary, Li spent three years following the struggles of two families of migrants living in Xi'an since 2007.



Li Junhu

Zhang Zhili (right) and her husband moved to the city with Caoqin (left), their youngest son.

Zhang Zhili's two daughters remained in the countryside to attend school.

Photos provided by Li Junhu



In 1984, the government revised its housing regulations to allow rural residents to work in the city.

The decision was a watershed event that inspired waves of farmers to head for coastal boom towns in search for fortune. By 2009, more than 300 million rural residents were living and working in China's cities.

The families of Zhang Zhili and Yang Xiuqing are typical of new migrants.

Two years ago, Zhang and her husband moved to the city with their youngest son Caoqin. Their two daughters were left in the countryside to attend school.

Yang followed her husband to the city much earlier in 1995. Five years later, her husband was killed in a car accident. Yang used the money from the settlement

to purchase city residency papers for her two children in 2000.

For both families, life has been anything but easy.

Caoqin has been barred from compulsory education by high tuition costs, leaving Zhang to draw on her own limited education experience to home school her son. Xiaohe, the daughter they left in the countryside, has been skipping classes and wanting to come to the city to join her parents in working.

Although Yang's son, Zhang Tao, was able to enroll in a junior high school, he is required to pay twice the tuition of other students. Her daughter, Zhang Ting, quit school to help support her brother. She and her mother work hard hours into the night and sleep on a bare mattress.

Although both families

have suffered for the city's prosperity, neither has the time nor money to enjoy the results of their labor.

At the end of the documentary, Caoqin is still being home schooled and Xiaohe has come to Xi'an to work as a waitress.

But that's not the end of the families' stories. There is still the next generation.

Li decided to end with Yang's daughter reading in her classroom in the countryside, since it invited viewers to consider whether she would follow her mother.

"Truth and interpretation are the foundation of a good film. The viewer should have room to reflect on the film's events," Li said.

He still keeps in touch with the two families and has become good friends.

Where Should I Go began as a 28-minute special supported by Shaanxi TV. The



full version was completed with the financial aid of the CNEX project, which supports Chinese filmmakers.

"From my works you can see that I'm not concerned about the city or the countryside specifically – I'm interested in where they meet," Li said. "The environmental and mental changes those migrants go through interests me."

"Living in the countryside is inconvenient and hard. I don't regret coming to the city, there's no way back even if I regret," Caoqin said.

"They realize it's a lack of education that is responsible for their poverty, so they will do anything to stay in the city for the sake of their children. They never think about it being a one-way trip," Li said.

"If we don't provide their children with access to education, we'll have a new generation of illiterate workers."

Li graduated from Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in 2003 and has been shooting documentaries ever since. He hopes to have the opportunity to make feature films in the future.



Su Guangyu's new collection, 2,800 yuan



Bugatti Plata leather bag, 4,100 yuan

Design inspired by flowers and leaves



2,300 yuan



2,600 yuan



Incognita Rojo, 3,200 yuan



Culote BALON olive shape bag, 3,580 yuan

By Annie Wei

Spring's almost here, and now is the time to shop for a new warm-weather look.

Beijing Today would like to introduce 24-year-old local designer Su Guangyu, who is working on a haute couture series and takes customized orders.

Su said his inspiration comes from his childhood memories of flowers while growing up in Hainan Province. They inspired his aesthetics: low-profile, elegant and romantic.

Being trendy is not Su's goal. But his designs are simple, curvy and functional, especially for sophisticated modern women.

His 2012 spring and summer collection was inspired from leaf veins, he said. The design focuses on lines and curves.

Anyone interested can check out his Taobao store, which sells unique leather pieces from independent Spanish designers.

Website: nachodai.taobao.com



Earrings, 450 yuan



Atenea Dorado leather bag, 3,960 yuan

Photos provided by Yang Dai/Su Guangyu

New cafe with delicious and simple menu

By Annie Wei

Although new residential compounds have sprung up near East Fourth Ring Road, quality restaurants have been slow to follow.

But the opening of a series of new outlets, including Sculpting in Time, the Lohos City and the city's second Grand Summit mall, has brought a new joy to people living in these neighborhoods.

The new Grand Summit isn't as popular as the flagship location near the US embassy, but its Marketable Café has begun attracting attention. Thanks to owner Liu Zi, a former actress turned high-end furniture brand and home décor expert, celebrities have patronized the place and drawn media attention.

The cafe's menu is simple, but the food is very good. Most items are priced between 38 and 58 yuan, with Asian selections plus hamburgers, tea and coffee.

Its Asian delight section features south-eastern Asian classics like Hainan chicken rice (58 yuan), half a chicken with rice cooked in chicken broth and served with homemade chili sauce, sweet dark sauce and ginger sauce; and Chiang Mai beef and vegetable curry (42 yuan), served in a bowl of rice. The beef and vegetables are fully flavored with Thai herbs, but the taste remains crisp.

We like its udon salad (42 yuan), smooth and chewy noodle wrapped with miso sauce, mustard, garlic, honey, seaweed, sliced pan-fried egg, carrots and bean sprouts.

The Japanese sushi is also recommended. We like its foie gras and mango (68 yuan), which is delightful and topped with fried fish roe. Some dishes are marked with a green leaf, meaning they are suitable for vegetarians, like mango and cheese (58 yuan). The mango pairs well with cheese and avocado.

The M+café is only one of the stores on the first floor. Nearby is a wine store and a bakery.

M+café

Where: The Grand Summit, Gongyuan 5 Hao, 17 Tianshui Xiyuan, Chaoyang District
Open: 10 am – 10 pm
Tel: 6599 6770



The second Grand Summit mall CFP Photos



Sushi priced 50 to 68 yuan is the highlight of Marketable Cafe.



Great deals on good restaurants now available online

By Annie Wei

Diners, rejoice: Beijing Restaurant Week is back, so from March 12 to 18, great deals are available on some of the best restaurants in town.

The concept of Restaurant Week is to give everyday people the opportunity to try high-end restaurants at affordable prices, and it gives restaurants a chance to target whole new demographics.

During Beijing Restaurant Week, participating restaurants will charge only 78 or 118 yuan for three-course lunches and 168 or 248 yuan for three-course dinners. Restaurants include Whampoa Club, Maison Boulud, Brasserie Flo or Peninsula Huang Ting.

Reservations are being taken at restaurant-week.cn since yesterday February 23.

The event was started by DiningCity.com in 1998 in New York. Now it operates in 35 countries. The first restaurant week in Shanghai in 2010 had 26 restaurants. This year it will include 100, from March 5 to 11.

"From experience, we know that the most popular restaurants will be booked within minutes," said Onno Scherures, managing director of DiningCity.com for the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong.

Although some restaurants have put aside very few seats for Restaurant Week, people who don't successfully book online can still call the restaurant to inquire about openings. Some restaurants may increase the number of seats available for reservation over the course of the week.



Restaurant Week has become a global phenomenon, a way for diners to try fancy restaurants at affordable prices.

Photos provided by DiningCity.com

Dining

Wine buffet at Lobby Lounge

Warm away the last days of winter with a wine buffet at Lobby Lounge.

Sit back and enjoy unlimited samples of six wines, each selected with by sommelier Eric Wu, whose passion and expertise has made this stunning assortment of New and Old World wines possible. Travel the world through wines in the comfort of Lobby Lounge's palace-inspired interior.

Exquisite entertainment is provided by an all-female quartet playing traditional Chinese instruments.

The luxurious wine buffet is available for 288 yuan at the China World Hotel, Beijing. Guests receive a complimentary plate of antipasti to complement the wine.

Where: Lobby Lounge, China World Hotel, 1 Jianguomen Wai Dajie, Chaoyang District

When: Friday and Saturday, March 1-31, 8-10 pm

Cost: 288 yuan per person (15 percent surcharge)

Tel: 6505 2266 ext. 37 or 6505 5838



New Happy Valley Chinese Restaurant

Happy Valley may have a new location and a new look, but you can expect the same passionately created traditional Chinese cuisine.

Now located on the 2nd floor of Huahan Hotel, Happy Valley continues to offer business lunch packages to meet convenient business travel needs. Come and feast at its delicious dim sum buffet.

The business set lunch includes a main course with the chef's daily soup and fruit platter, barbecue pork rice, chicken in soy sauce rice, roast goose rice and two types of barbecue combination rice.

Where: 2 Chaoyangmen Bei Dajie, Chaoyang District

When: Monday to Friday, 11:30 am - 2 pm

Cost: 78 yuan per person

Tel: 6553 2288 ext. 2146/2157



Winter buffet at Bloo Dining

This winter, warm up at Bloo Dining with a lavish buffet of traditional Cantonese soups. Guests are invited to take a rest, escape from the cold weather and nourish their bodies with the many offerings.

The winter buffet features a unique combination of innovative international and Asian cuisines, including Cantonese congee, a salad bar, southeastern cuisines, an open station and many choices of Chinese food.

To get through the winter, Bloo Dining is presenting two traditional Cantonese soups each day, such as pork chop with lotus root and peanuts, chicken with Chinese dates and medlar, beef brisket with ginger and Chinese angelica, pork with mushrooms and ginkgo, snakehead with watercress and bantams with chestnut and yam.

Cantonese soup helps to improve one's physical strength and is rich in nutritional value.

Located on the second floor of the hotel, Bloo Dining is a smart, stylish contemporary environment for corporate entertainments, social gatherings and private dining. It is open for breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner.

Where: Park Plaza Beijing, 97 Jinbao Jie, Dongcheng District

When: daily, 11:30 am - 2 pm

Cost: 88 yuan per person

Tel: 8522 1999 ext 3623



Aria offers single malt whisky passport

Join Aria Bar for a rare chance to enjoy 100 whiskies from Scotland's sensational whisky-making regions, with taste flights to sample the world's finest single malts, from Glen Elgin to Glenkinchie, Royal Lochnagar to Talisker.

Experience the creativity of Single Malt Elegance with your personalized passport at Aria Bar, perfectly accompanied by singer Valeria and her uncompromising jazz band to celebrate a fiery night of passion and indulgence.

It will be a rewarding and exciting journey.

Where: Aria Bar, China World Hotel, 1 Jianguomen Wai Dajie, Chaoyang District

When: March 1031

Tel: 6505 2266 ext. 36 or 6505 5838



Hotel

Singaporean delegation chooses Grand Millennium Beijing

A high-ranking Singaporean delegation arrived in Beijing on February 9 for talks with Chinese government officials. Leading the delegation was K. Shanmugam, minister of Foreign Affairs, and Wong Kan Seng, former deputy Prime Minister to the Republic of Singapore.



The group resided at Grand Millennium Beijing and was hosted by general manager Gino Tan, hotel manager Glen Cook, who is pictured here with Wong and Shanmugam.

New director of sales and marketing at Swissotel

Michelle Yoon has been appointed as director of sales and marketing for Swissotel Beijing. She will be responsible for all sales and marketing activities at the landmark hotel.

Yoon has worked for three years at the Swissotel Beijing as director of sales; prior to that she was the senior sales manager at the Swissotel Merchant Court.

In her new role, Yoon will direct the sales and marketing team and will oversee sales, catering sales, marketing communications and revenue management, as well as reservations.



Rent

2-bed apartment by Shuangjing

This fully furnished two-bedroom apartment is located by Shuangjing, has a sunlit interior and is clean and tidy.

In addition to the bedrooms, it has a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, a store-room and a balcony.

The apartment includes an LCD TV, refrigerator, washing machine, microwave oven, gas stove, air conditioner, central heating, 24-hour hot water, tea table, computer desk and sofa. Underground parking is available. Restaurants and bars are downstairs. The gym, pool and Carrefour hypermarket are within walking distance.

Rent: 6,000 yuan per month

Tel: 15801168406



(By Jackie Zhang)

Wed, Feb. 24

Nightlife

One in 2012: Hoochie Coochie Gentlemen

The Hoochie Coochie Gentlemen is a band formed by four close friends: Cheng Yafei, Jin

Dapeng, Liu Renyou and Hong Ge. It was founded in 2009 and has two albums. The players want to express their characteristic lifestyle through original music. As they say: "We want to hold your hand in 2012, on so-called doomsday, and pursue the simplest life with the most innocent happiness."

Where: Jianghu Bar, 7 Mianhua Hutong, Jiaodaokou Nan Dajie, Dongcheng District
When: 9-11:30 pm
Admission: 40 yuan
Tel: 6401 5269



Thu, Feb. 25



Movie Song and Moon

"Song and moon" is a traditional custom practiced by the Dong, an ethnic minority in southwestern China, in which young men and women use local folk songs to communicate and express their love.

Song and Moon is a love story set in a Dong village. The heroine stays in the village after graduating from high school while her lover works in the city. When he returns, she realizes he no longer loves her. This is a classic story reflecting the cost of modernization.

Where: Broadway Cinema-theque, 1 Xiangheyuan Lu, Dongzhimen, Dongcheng District

When: 7-9 pm

Admission: 40 yuan

Tel: 8438 8258

Culture Salon

Eyes of Franz Kafka

Kafka's works have greatly influenced literature in the 20th century. He tackled topics such as family, education, vocation, love, marriage, disease and death with incredible poignancy, and his ideas have sparked intellectual movements worldwide.

Professor Zeng Yanbing from Renmin University of China will analyze Kafka's work and life and share his thinking about this literary giant.

Where: 2nd floor, Capital Library, 88 Dong Sanhuan Nan Lu, Chaoyang District

When: 2-4 pm

Admission: Free

Tel: 6735 8114



景不徙

Mon, Feb. 26

Exhibition

Eternal scenery: Chinese Young Artists Group Exhibition

"The eternal scenery" is a famous phrase to describe the artist Mozi's work in which he demonstrated the relationship between light and shadow, the ephemeral and eter-

nal. Young artists participating in this group exhibition have all witnessed China's transformations in the era of reform. Their works are marked with a sense of change. The paintings reflect the artists' reflections on personal growth and the regression of traditional culture.

Where: 241- 15 Caochangdi, Chaoyang District

When: 3-4 pm

Admission: Free

Tel: 5127 3267 / 3268

Sat, Feb. 27

The crosstalk Hip-Hop's special crosstalk

Featuring a young generation of cross-talk performers, this show will bring their distinctive voices onto stage at Guangmingge Theater. Hip-Hop is a group formed in 2008 by crosstalk performers in their mid-20s. By innovating



the traditional art of crosstalk, they quickly became famous in China. Their goal is to entertain audiences with their humor and let everyone know that there's a group of young adults who are pursuing their dreams and bringing happiness to people around them.

Where: 61 Gulou Xi Dajie, Xicheng District

When: Daily until February 29, 7:30-9 pm

Admission: 30-100 yuan

Tel: 6401 8988

Tue, Feb. 28

Movie

My Architect: A Son's Journey

My Architect is a tale of love and art, betrayal and forgiveness, in which the illegitimate son of a legendary artist undertakes a five-year trip around the world



to understand his long-dead father. Louis I. Kahn, who died in 1974, is considered by many architectural historians to have been the most important architect of the second half of the 20th century.

In *My Architect*, the filmmaker reveals the haunting beauty of his father's monumental creations and takes us deep within his own divided family, uncovering a world of prejudice, intrigue and myths that haunt parents and children. In a documentary feature film (including an original orchestral score), Nathaniel's personal journey becomes a universal investigation of identity, a celebration of art and, ultimately, of life itself.

Where: No. 3 Private Club, 43 Bei Sanhuan Xi Lu, Haidian District

When: 7:30-10 pm

Admission: 15 yuan

Tel: 8211 5288

Nightlife Open Mic Night

The stage is open to anyone. Open mic is an occasion of freedom. Anyone who takes the stage will receive free drinks for their bravery.

Where: Hot Cat Club, 46 Fangjia Hutong, Andingmen Nei Dajie, Dongcheng District

When: Every Thursday until March 30, 8:30-11:30 pm

Admission: Free

Tel: 6400 7868

Sun, Feb. 29



Documentary An Inconvenient Truth

From director Davis Guggenheim, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a passionate and inspirational look at former Vice President Al Gore's fervent crusade to halt

Sun, Mar. 1

global warming's deadly progress by exposing the myths and misconceptions that surround it. In this intimate portrait of Gore and his "traveling global warming show," Gore comes across as never before in the media - funny, engaging, open and intent on alerting citizens to this "planetary emergency" before it's too late.

Where: China Film Archive, 3 Wenhuiyuan Lu, Haidian District

When: 7-9 pm

Admission: 20 yuan

Tel: 6225 4422

(By Zhang Yuting)

Strawberry-picking available at international expo

By Zhang Dongya

The 7th International Strawberry Symposium, which opened last Saturday in Changping District, attracted nearly 50,000 visitors in its first week. About 200 enterprises have attended the expo, representing about 50 countries.

During the five-day symposium, visitors were not allowed to taste the strawberries. But starting yesterday, the Strawberry Expo Garden became open to the public, with several zones in the garden allowing visitors to pick from several types of strawberries to take home.



Strawberry world

The symposium is set on a farm that has been designed to pay tribute to everything strawberry.

One of the attractions in the main garden – dotted with Chinese scholar trees and different pines, including the Chinese red pine and white bark pine – is a 124-meter-long and 7-meter-wide bridge decorated with papercuts. Visitors can get on from elevators on both sides.

The garden's gate resembles two sleeping strawberries, while the corridors look like strawberry flowers.

Inside the garden is "Strawberry Waterfall," where thousands of strawberries have recently ripened and hang from the high ceiling.

A symbolic building – Three Centers – is stylistically embossed, making it look like it's wearing a strawberry coat.

In another building, visitors learn how strawberries can be found all over the globe, connecting people together.

Streetlamps, signs and other facilities feature strawberry elements as well.

A strawberry hospital and strawberry farm were built for local farmers. The strawberry hospital will cooperate with Taiwanese experts as a technology service station to supply scientific and technological service for locals.

Planned entertainment facilities include a sandpit and outdoor classroom. They are expected to provide a place for children to experience what the strawberry farm is all about.

A wide variety

There are about 600,000 strawberry shrubs on display at the expo, each labeled in Chinese and English – though it still might



The large exhibition hall of the international strawberry expo is decorated with strawberries.

CFP Photos



A wide variety of strawberries from Japan and Europe are available for picking.

be difficult for the layman to distinguish one species from the other.

"Usually, we tell different species by the shape of their leaves and height of the plants," said a staff member. "But it is hard to tell the specific difference between different species – you can recognize it when you are familiar with it."

More than 130 species of strawberry are on exhibit. Among them, the Japanese species are the most expensive, while those from European

countries are cheaper.

Farmers grow 26 species in Changping, with eight originally from Europe and the US and nine from Japan.

Japanese species are the most popular because they taste sweeter. The farm is looking to harvest more Japanese strawberries in the future.

Prices vary widely. Some species sell for 180 yuan per kilogram, while some can go for 600 yuan per kilogram.

Strawberry banquet

Surrounding places like Niufang Village in Xiaotang-

shan Town are hosting "strawberry banquets," with dishes made from the fruit.

For example, the cook will use strawberry juice instead of ketchup to make braised beef feet in soy sauce, and he'll garnish his dishes with ripe strawberries.

An appetizer of strawberries with sugar has been given the elegant name *taxue xunmei* – "looking for strawberries (pronounced the same as the plum flower) while treading snow."

Most dishes are easy to cook, and diners are encouraged to try them at home.

The fruit is also paired with chocolate, and there will be special strawberry tanghulu – candied strawberries on a stick.

The expo will last until June 30. During these four months, there will be many activities, including a creative strawberry market, strawberry picking, iris exhibition, Changping strawberry mapping and strawberry culture exhibition.

Strawberry Expo

Where: Strawberry Expo Garden, Xing-shou Town, Changping District

Getting there: Take Subway Line 5 to Tiantongyuanbei station and transfer to Bus 537 or 59 to Xiangtun. Or drive along Badaling Expressway and take Shahe Exit. Drive along Shunsha Lu to Daliushu Huandao, then take Ansi Lu to Strawberry Expo Park

Open: 9 am – 5 pm
Admission: 60 yuan, 30 yuan for students
Tel: 6756 9867

Note: There are seven parking lots at the expo with 4,000 spots. It's designed so that parents with strollers are able to access with no problem.

Other facilities like public toilets and ticket halls are also wheelchair friendly.

About the 7th International Strawberry Symposium

The 7th International Strawberry Symposium (ISS) was held in Changping District from February 18 to 22. The first six symposiums were held in Europe and the US. This year was the first time it was held in Asia.

Changping is a well-known strawberry growing area and production base. The organizing committee of the seventh ISS was formed with help from institutes and organizations including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Chinese Society for Horticultural Science and the Strawberry Section of Chinese Society for Horticultural Science. The theme of the symposium is Green, Freshness, Health and Development, which highlights mankind's history of crop production. The symposium, especially with its invited lecturers and oral presenters, aimed to provide an effective way to achieve this goal.